

Hearing parents and deaf children learning a sign language together

Deborah Chen Pichler
Gallaudet University



Diane Lillo-Martin
University of Connecticut & Haskins Labs;
Radboud University, Nijmegen (Sp2018)



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A note about today's bimodal bilingual presentation

- Diane and Debbie will be presenting today's talk in spoken English and American Sign Language, respectively.
- Content in both talks is **equivalent and autonomous**, so please feel free to attend to whichever best suits your preferences.

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What this project is about

- Sometimes hearing parents of deaf children choose to include a sign language in their child's linguistic input.
- Many parents choose to learn that sign language alongside their children.
- Parent's learning context is quite different from typical sign language students, influencing their experiences and attitudes.
- Parent signing skills might facilitate linguistic, cognitive, social-emotional, and overall development for deaf children, but there is no research investigating this.
- Systematic research can help in the design of improved methods for teaching this unique population and supporting their journey.
- We start by trying to better understand the experiences of parents who have made the decision to include a sign language in their home.

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Current situation for deaf children and their hearing parents looks discouraging.

- “Significantly delayed first language acquisition is likely to be a hallmark of L1 [sign language] learning by all deaf children whose hearing parents have no prior experience of deafness.” (Mayer & Leigh 2010: 179).
- “But successful second language learning by adults (including learning a sign language by hearing parents) cannot be taken for granted.” (Knors & Marshark 2012: 295).

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How proficiently do hearing parents have to sign to benefit their deaf children, especially those with a CI?



Successful development of ASL and English with Deaf signing parents

(Davidson et al. 2014)



Will less proficient ASL input from hearing parents still benefit children's development, or will it hurt more than help? (Knors & Marschark 2012)

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Preliminary study with hearing parents who are learning ASL with their deaf children

- Questionnaire and semi-structured interviews with hearing parents of deaf children who are including ASL as a home language.
- Topics in the interview include:
 - motivations for signing
 - separation between ASL and other signed systems
 - experiences as L2 ASL learners

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Family Interviews – Participants

Child Pseudonym	Child Gender	Age at interview	Hearing technology	Interviewed	Self Evaluation of ASL
ELLA	F	1 year	hearing aid (HoH)	Mother	beginner
HANA	F	1 year	hearing aid; CI scheduled for 15 mo	Mother	beginner
ÅSA	F	16 months	none (rarely uses hearing aid)	Mother	advanced
CHUCK	M	2 -1/2 years	hearing aids	Mother	beginner
NANCY	F	2 -1/2 years	bilateral CI	Father Mother	beginner
SEBASTIÁN	M	2 -1/2 years	BAHA	Mother	beginner
LUCÍA	F	3 years	hearing aid	Mother Grandmother Godmother	beginner
KAI	M	3 -1/2 years	hearing aid	Mother Father	intermediate advanced
SIENNA	F	5 years	hearing aid	Mother	intermediate
CLARA	F	6 years	bilateral CI	Mother	intermediate

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Main research questions for hearing parents who have committed to ASL

1. What made you choose ASL, despite pressure against signing with deaf children?
2. What are your goals for learning ASL for themselves? for your deaf children?
3. What aspects of ASL have been the hardest to learn? the most intuitive to learn?
4. What methods are the most effective for learning ASL?
5. What resources do you still need to support their family's development of ASL?

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Q1 What made you **choose ASL**, despite pressure against signing with deaf children?

- ❑ I felt ASL would help me to bond and communicate better with my deaf child.
- ❑ I realized that ASL is a rich language and I want my child to have access to it.
- ❑ Reports that baby signs are beneficial for language development.
- “My Deaf child has a right to fully accessible language and to be fully included in all family activities.” (as many options as possible)
- “It was a logical choice” (previous knowledge)
- “I’m not easily impressionable” (independence from others’ opinions)

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Q2 What are your **goals** for learning ASL? goals for your deaf children?

- ❑ To learn enough ASL to support my speech when my child has trouble understanding me.
- ❑ To become an ASL-English bilingual person, actively using both languages.
- ❑ To adopt ASL a family language, used by more than just my deaf child and me.
- For the child: To develop Deaf identity
- For the parent: To be able to communicate with their child in the child’s chosen language

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Q3 What aspects of ASL have been the **hardest** to learn? the most intuitive to learn?

	Very easy	Not difficult	Quite difficult	Near impossible
Accurate form		6	3	1
Vocabulary	1.5	4.5	5	
Fingerspelling	1	3.5	5.5	1
Nonmanuals	2	5.5	2.5	
Storytelling skills	1	1	6.5	2.5
Word order		2	8	1
Classifiers		1.5	8.5	
Eye gaze	2	5	3.5	0.5
Child-directed sign	3	4.5	3.5	

fewer responses

more responses

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Q3 How **important** is each aspect of ASL for hearing parents of deaf children?

	Critical	Useful but not required	Not that important
Accurate form	5	3	2
Vocabulary	7	4	
Fingerspelling	8	3	
Nonmanuals	9.5	1.5	
Storytelling skills	10	1	
Word order	5	5.5	0.5
Classifiers	5.5	4.5	
Eye gaze	9	1	
Child-directed sign	8	2	1

fewer responses

more responses

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Q4 What **methods** are the most effective for learning ASL?

- One-on-one contact (Deaf mentor, online options)
- Corrective feedback
- General online materials (for parents, children, siblings)
- Early childhood educational program at the school
- Deaf community
- Classes at a local college/university

“Patience”

“Keep trying!”

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Q5 What **resources** do you still need to support their family's development of ASL?

- More contact with Deaf signers, one-to-one
- Combination of in-person and e-meetings
- Continuity of resources provided across the different periods of child's life
- Recurring theme: Lack of support to use signs or sign language.
 - parents left on their own to locate resources for signing
 - need more advanced sign language classes that go beyond just vocabulary

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Lack of support for more in-depth ASL learning after first few years.

"Vocabulary is not enough. I don't want SimCom, I want ASL!"

"We're worried that [as his ASL expands,] family communication won't be spontaneous because of our own limitations in ASL."

"I'm worried what I'll do after she turns 5 and our ASL services get cut off."

"We are stuck at intermediate level. We're already in the last ASL class offered in our area, but we still don't feel fluent."

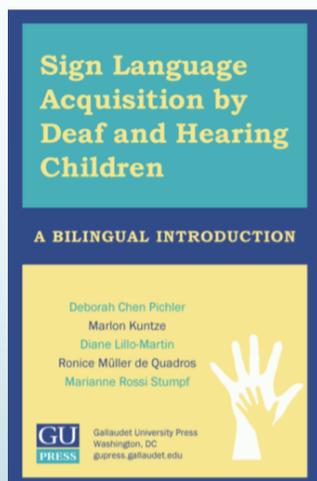
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Looking forward

- Hearing parents have an urgent need to learn to sign basics quickly, and then to go beyond survival level to real conversation.
- Deaf children and their parents need the Deaf community to foster continual language growth.
- Creating a new and unique heritage language context; consequences remain to be studied.
- We are developing a new project to track parent ASL development and its relationship with the development of their deaf children.

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New family-friendly textbook on sign language acquisition available NOW!



- ▶ Online content in ASL and English
- ▶ Covers research on :
 - ▶ child sign language acquisition 0 to 5
 - ▶ acquisition in diverse contexts
 - ▶ bimodal bilingualism
 - ▶ adult sign language L2 acquisition
- ▶ Available from Gallaudet University Press at <https://signlanguageacquisition.com/>
- ▶ All author royalties are donated to the Nyle DiMarco Foundation

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